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THE 15 MOST CORRUPT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

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- Sen. Roland Burris (D-IL)
- Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA)
- Rep. Nathan Deal (R-GA)
- Sen. John Ensign (R-NV)
- Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL)
- Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA)
- Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
- Rep. Allen B. Nobolan (D-WY)
- Rep. John P. Murtha (D-PA)
- Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)
- Rep. Laura Richardson (D-CA)
- Rep. Pete Visclosky (D-IN)
- Rep. Marlene Weiers (D-CA)
- Rep. Don Young (R-AK)

Ensign e-mails contradict some ethics probe claims

By Benjamin Spillman, Las Vegas Review-Journal

March 10, 2010

A series of e-mails disclosed Wednesday by The New York Times documents efforts by Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., to help a former staffer line up lobbying work in the aftermath of Ensign's affair with the staffer's wife.

The newspaper posted five pieces of e-mail correspondence among Doug Hampton, the staffer in question, Ensign and others associated with the senator.

"The messages are the first written records from Mr. Ensign documenting his efforts to find clients for Mr. Hampton, a top aide and close friend, after the senator had an affair with his wife, Cynthia Hampton," The Times said.

The newspaper continued: "They appear to undercut the senator's assertion that he did not know the work might involve Congressional lobbying, which could violate a ban on such activities by staff members for a year after leaving government."

Ensign is being investigated by the Senate Ethics Committee in connection with the scandal. And in January, the FBI began to investigate allegations of wrongdoing, sources have said.

Ensign acknowledged the affair but has denied any other wrongdoing.

Ensign disputed The Times' characterization of the correspondence the paper posted Wednesday.

"Any allegation or inference that Senator Ensign's motivation for doing his job as a Senator was anything but for the good of his state is completely false and misleading. He did everything necessary to ensure there was no impropriety whatsoever in this matter," Ensign spokeswoman, Rebecca Fisher wrote.

She continued: "No one is more anxious for this investigation to be completed and for the facts to come out than Senator Ensign."

The first correspondence The Times posted was an e-mail dated May 23, 2008, to Ensign from Bob Andrews, then executive vice president of P2SA Equity of Las Vegas, an alternative energy investment firm.

Andrews thanked Ensign for meeting with him and co-owner Greg Paulk regarding help the government could offer related to a biodiesel plant and another project near Sloan.

He concluded: "Give me information regarding next week's fundraising and we will certainly attend."

The e-mail was forwarded to Hampton from Ensign's account with the comment, "I think you have played golf with him. This is who I met with."

The Times concluded the correspondence is evidence Ensign met with Andrews with the goal of helping Hampton get work, which Hampton needed following the departure from Ensign's office in the affair aftermath.

The paper also reported that Andrews' comment about fundraising concerned members of Ensign's staff. Subsequently, Ensign returned \$1,566.66 of a \$10,000 donation Paulk made to a political action committee Ensign shares with several other politicians. The refund represented Ensign's share of the contribution, according to the paper.

More e-mails posted by The Times include statements from Hampton asserting Ensign was lining up lobbying work. Hampton has made the assertion numerous times.

One message from Ensign consultant Mike Slanker to Hampton seeks to soothe the embittered former staffer.

The note, dated May 26, 2008, assures Hampton that Slanker spoke with Ensign about the possibility P2SA might have lobbying work available.

In a subsequent e-mail, Hampton tells Ensign: "You ensured me that you would have no issues getting at least three clients and that more than likely I would make more money consulting than I did working for the Senate."

In another Hampton says P2SA declined to hire him.

"Bob (finally) got back to me and they have decided they do not need service at this time," the Hampton e-mail to Ensign said.

A woman who answered the phone Wednesday at PZSA's listed number said Andrews is no longer with the firm. She said she would leave a message with Paulk.

Slakter did not return an e-mail seeking comment, and attorney Daniel Albrechts, who has represented Hampton, was unavailable for comment.

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SHERMAN FREDERICK: Honey, I shrunk the city

By Sherman Frederick, Las Vegas Review-Journal

February 28, 2010

You want five sure-fire topics to spice up the conversation at your next Las Vegas coffee klatch? Try any one of these this week:

Got Detroit?

Should we roll the dice on the economy snapping back soon, or would it be better to proactively bulldoze stressed neighborhoods and empty commercial buildings, returning them to the open desert from whence they came to conserve government services and shore up real estate prices?

Whew, that's a mouthful. While the temporary woes of Las Vegas are a far cry from the generations of despair in Detroit, consider new Detroit Mayor Dave Bing (yes, the former NBA great):

Let's razee desolate Detroit neighborhoods and relocate residents.

"If we don't do it," he says, "you know this whole city is going to go down. You can't support every community across this city. Those communities that are stable, we can't allow them to go down the tubes."

Again, we ain't Detroit. But even in bright and shiny Las Vegas, empty buildings and neighborhoods, left too long without private ownership and caring residents, will devolve.

Is the Detroit option viable for us? Doubtful?

Bribe me, baby!

The latest whisper in the wind has the busy bees inside the Harry Reid campaign preparing the senator to make a big employment announcement for Southern Nevada. Can't verify it, hence the coffee klatch relegation.

It's been a hard year for many Reid supporters watching the longtime senator slip to the bottom of the polls, all the while sticking to his "I'm too big to fail" campaign mantra. His supporters could use something tangible to point to, and a big jobs project would be just the ticket.

Hope it's not a chicken-feed futuristic announcement, but an immediate big job driver -- several thousand jobs at least.

Would it be an election-year conversion? A bribe, if you will? Sure. To which I add: Bribe me, baby!

Ensign (sigh)

Watching Republicans and Democrats on tee-vee talk health care with the president last week reminded me of how much national recognition Sen. John Ensign's affair cost him and Nevada. John would have swung a big bat at that table. Instead, he's relegated to the shadows, a disgraced senator who doesn't matter much.

Assuming there's not a legal shoe to drop in the form of an indictment for the way he stupidly handled the exit of his lover's husband from his staff (and I don't make that assumption, by the way), I'm not sure where John goes from here. Is there redemption for poking your wife's best friend?

Wynn-isms

"The policies in Washington, the policies of government have taken a terrible toll on the working people in America that came to Las Vegas. I'm excited for 2010 and beyond for Macau. I wish I could say the same thing about Las Vegas."

So sayeth Steve Wynn.

He's right with this one proviso: In November, Americans can (and will) peacefully change political course. How often does that happen in communist China? And when it does, how's it usually work out for profit-making companies?

Again, Wayne?

Looks like favorite son Wayne Newton is once again in the news for fumbling his personal finances. He ought to run for the Legislature. He'd be a financial genius there.

Sherman Frederick (sfrederick@reviewjournal.com) is publisher of the Las Vegas Review-Journal and president of Stephens Media.

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**THE 15 MOST
CORRUPT MEMBERS
OF CONGRESS****FBI starts Ensign probe**

By Steve Tetraault, Las Vegas Review-Journal

January 20, 2010

The FBI queries to Ensign associates have come via phone calls and not personal visits, suggesting it is not yet an urgent matter for the agency. There is little evidence to suggest it will become a full-blown criminal investigation, sources said.

Agents have requested to meet with former Ensign aides and associates in what appears to be a preliminary look at the matter involving the senator and Doug Hampton, a former administrative assistant who has accused Ensign of circumventing the law in an attempt to smooth over an affair he had with Hampton's wife.

The FBI queries to Ensign associates have come via phone calls and not personal visits, suggesting it is not yet an urgent matter for the agency. There is little evidence to suggest it will become a full-blown criminal investigation, sources said.

SBF, the involvement of federal law enforcers deepens the hole in which Ensign finds himself after admitting in June that he had a nine-month affair in 2007-08 with Cindy Hampton, a friend of his wife and a former finance aide on his two political committees.

Once a rising star in Republican circles, the Nevada has taken a lower profile in the Senate since he acknowledged the affair. Ensign has said he plans to seek re-election in 2012, but other political figures in the state have begun eyeing the seat.

The FBI's action follows movement in a separate investigation being conducted by the Senate Ethics Committee. The panel last month issued subpoenas to several Ensign associates and people who worked in his office.

Among the reported recipients of Senate subpoenas were former Ensign Chief of Staff John Lopez and Mike Shanley, a longtime Ensign political consultant and former staff director at the National Republican Senatorial Committee during 2008 when Ensign was chairman.

NV Energy also acknowledged receiving a request for information from the Senate committee. The company is one of several Nevada firms Hampton said was contacted by Ensign in an effort to obtain lobbying work for him.

Regarding the FBI probe, "Lopez has been contacted, and I expect others have been as well," a source said Tuesday.

Lopez referred a query to his attorney. Shanley did not respond to a call for comment, nor did an attorney for Doug Hampton.

Robert Kellner, an attorney for Lopez, said, "John Lopez is well-known on Capitol Hill for integrity and professionalism. During his many years in public service, he complied with the law and worked hard for the people of Nevada."

Ensign has denied any legal or ethical wrongdoing.

"Senator Ensign believes he fully complied with all ethics laws and rules, and plans to cooperate with any official inquiries," spokeswoman Rebecca Fisher said.

Ensign's office did not reply to a question of whether the FBI had contacted the senator or anyone on his staff.

Meanwhile, Ensign's standing might be weakening further among fellow Republicans in Nevada.

Senate candidate Danny Tarkanian was quoted in a September news report saying he would welcome Ensign's support. In Washington on Tuesday, the Republican indicated that could change.

Tarkanian said his position "obviously changes" if Ensign's case "has gotten to be more serious."

Referring to the FBI actions, Tarkanian said, "I am assuming this is another step making it more serious."

Republican Senate candidate Sue Lowden, who was campaigning in Searchlight, said it was good that the Ensign investigation was going forward.

"I think it should be fully investigated so that once and for all he is cleared of all charges. If the charges are true, he should follow what he has said to others before, and he should step down."

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- Rep. Don Young (R-AK)

Rep. Dean Heller, R-Nev., said on a television interview show, "Nevada Newsmakers," earlier this month that Ensign's case has put a cloud over the ability of the state's congressional delegation to meet. If the FBI were to get involved and an indictment were to be issued, "yeah, it will have serious repercussions," he said.

Hampton, of Las Vegas, worked as administrative assistant, a top position in Ensign's Washington office, but left in May 2008, the same time his wife left Ensign's employ.

Doug Hampton has alleged they were dismissed because of the affair, which Ensign has said started in December 2007 and ended in August 2008.

Doug Hampton further has said that after he left the senator's staff, Ensign arranged lobbying work for him in a knowing violation of "revolving door" limits set in law on lobbying by former Senate staff members.

Hampton has said Ensign was trying to smooth over their relationship and help him recoup income after he left his Senate job, but the arrangements did not work out.

Questions also have surrounded a \$96,000 check that Ensign's parents made out to the Hamptons in April 2008.

An attorney for Ensign has characterized it as an expression of generosity after his parents learned of the affairs.

Hampton has described the payment as a severance, which could open up other legal issues for Ensign because the payment was not officially reported.

Melanie Sloan, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a watchdog group that has filed official complaints against Ensign with the Senate and the Federal Election Commission, said the FBI's involvement was no surprise.

"There is reason to believe Senator Ensign was involved in at least two felonies: conspiring to help former aide Doug Hampton violate the lobbying ban, and failing to report to the FEC the \$96,000 severance payment made to Cynthia Hampton," Sloan said.

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**THE 15 MOST
CORRUPT MEMBERS
OF CONGRESS****FBI contacting people in Ensign probe****By Steve Tetreault, Las Vegas Review-Journal***January 19, 2010*

WASHINGTON — The FBI has begun contacting people connected to the Sen. John Ensign scandal, a sign the agency might be initiating a criminal investigation, sources confirmed this morning.

Agents have requested to meet with former Ensign aides in what appears to be a preliminary look at the matter involving the senator and Doug Hampton, a former administrative assistant who has accused Ensign of circumventing the law in an attempt to smooth over an affair he had with Hampton's wife.

The queries, which have come through phone calls in the past week, suggest there is little urgency at this point, sources said.

The FBI's action follows on the heels of a movement in a separate investigation of Ensign being conducted by the Senate Ethics Committee. The committee last month issued subpoenas to several Ensign associates and people who worked in his office.

Among the reported recipients of Senate subpoenas were former chief of staff John Lopez and Mike Shanley, a longtime Ensign political consultant and former staff director at the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Regarding the FBI probe, "Lopez has been contacted, and I expect others have been as well," a source said this morning.

Robert Kalner, an attorney for Lopez, said in a statement "John Lopez is well-known on Capitol Hill for integrity and professionalism. During his many years in public service, he complied with the law and worked hard for the people of Nevada.

Ensign has denied any wrongdoing.

His office had no immediate comment on the latest development.

Hampton could not be immediately reached for comment.

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- Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA)
- Rep. Don Young (R-AK)

RACIAL REMARKS: Reid moves to drop flap

By Laura Myers, Las Vegas Review-Journal

January 12, 2010

Sen. Harry Reid sought Monday to put out a political brush fire that threatened to engulf his re-election campaign, saying he wanted to get back to work and was done apologizing for his private description of Barack Obama as a light-skinned black man who could turn his "Negro dialect" on and off.

"I'm not going to dwell on this anymore," Reid said in his first public comments since his race-related remarks were leaked from a book about the 2008 White House election. "It's in the book. I made all the statements I'm going to."

Republican leaders weren't ready to let the Nevada Democrat off the hook.

Michael Steele, head of the Republican Party, told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that he was tired of what he called a double standard that holds GOP politicians more accountable than Democrats for racial gaffes. The Republican National Committee chairman, who is black, also suggested the 70-year-old Reid is stuck in the past.

"This is 2010, not 1953," Steele said in an interview in Las Vegas, where he was organizing a Republican Party fund-raiser at the M Resort. "The guy seems to be a little out of touch."

Reid's description of Obama as a light-skinned African-American "with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one" came during a conversation in 2006 with the authors of the book "Game Change." The book also revealed that Reid surprised Obama by calling the then-freshman Illinois senator into his office in Washington and encouraging him to run for president.

"I'm very happy about that," Reid said Monday, noting he was one of the first people to suggest Obama seek the White House job. "I've enjoyed working with him. It's been tremendous, terrific."

Despite continuing GOP calls for Reid to resign, his position as Senate majority leader seemed safe for now after Obama personally accepted Reid's apology and as black leaders across the state and the nation offered him their public and personal support.

The latest expression of forgiveness came from Attorney General Eric Holder, who said in an interview with The Associated Press that the remark was "unfortunate, but I don't think that there is a prejudiced bone in his body." Holder is the first black to serve as the nation's top law enforcement official.

"I feel good about the people reaching out to me," Reid said. "I've apologized to the president. I've apologized to everyone that's within the sound of my voice that I could have used a better choice of words. I'll continue to do my work for the African-American community."

Asked by a reporter Monday whether he planned to apologize to voters for implying that a dark-skinned black man might not be electable as president, Reid dismissed the question, saying he was assured by heartfelt support from national and Nevada black leaders. It was the third and last question he took on the controversy.

Reid said he was eager to get back to work, including finishing negotiations with the White House and House leaders to ensure final passage of health care insurance reform.

"We have a lot of work to do, and I'll continue to do my very best for the people of the state of Nevada and this country," Reid said after holding a news conference at the Apex industrial complex north of Las Vegas to announce an energy project that could create several hundred jobs for Nevadans.

Still, the controversy is expected to cloud Reid's efforts to win a fifth term in the Senate and could affect his chances to gain support of blacks and Democrats in the November election -- votes he needs, as early polls show him, running 5 to 10 points behind his top potential GOP opponents.

"That's problematic for Reid because he needs every Democratic voter he can get, and therefore he needs a pretty strong turnout among minorities," said Jennifer Duffy of the Cook Political Report.

Although it might take longer than Reid would like, Duffy was among political analysts who believe the senator can turn the page on the topic because there are no video or audio clips that his opponents and Republicans can use in ads and replay over and over on TV and the Internet.

"Republicans will make hay out of this for a few days, but it will pretty much go away," Duffy said.

Or will it? Today, several of Reid's potential Republican opponents -- Darryl Hankman, Sue Lowden and Sherman Angle -- are expected to attend a news conference where the so-called Tea Party Express will announce \$1 million in anti-Reid television ads to air throughout Nevada.

The Tea Party movement is an anti-big government grass-roots effort that includes disaffected GOP conservatives who are trying to work more closely with the Republican Party to defeat Democrats.

"Our message for Harry Reid is that your arrogance, your condescension and your failures as a senator have not gone unnoticed," said Mark Williams, vice chairman of the Tea Party Express.

Rahner Spencer, a University of Nevada, Las Vegas, professor of anthropology and ethnic studies, said the Reid race flap is politics as usual between America's two major political parties.

"Democrats are trying to make it go away, and Republicans are trying to make it stick," Spencer said in an interview, adding that in his opinion, neither side has the interests of blacks in mind.

The Reid firestorm erupted just days before Democratic strategist Donna Brazile, the black vice chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, comes to Las Vegas on Thursday to help kick off an "African Americans for Senator Harry Reid" campaign.

The White House also confirmed that Obama himself will return to Las Vegas in February after delivering his State of the Union speech.

Reid even got a sign of support from fellow Nevada Sen. John Ensign, who has so far survived a major political scandal surrounding his confessed affair with a former staffer.

Ensign, in his first comments on the controversy, told a conservative talk show station, KOI-TV 3 in Reno, that Reid has been ensnared in media-fueled "politics of gotcha-ism."

"I don't know what his intentions were, but I take Senator Reid at his word," Ensign said. "I think his apology was sincere and he regretted how his comments were taken."

"I just think we need to get away from these politics of gotcha-ism," Ensign added. He blamed Democrats for "what they did to Trent Lott" and said "we shouldn't do the same thing to Senator Reid."

Lott, a Republican senator from Mississippi, resigned as Senate majority leader in 2002, 15 days after remarks he made at a 100th birthday party for Sen. Strom Thurmond, who ran for president in 1948 on a largely pro-segregation platform.

Lott said Mississippi had supported Thurmond's candidacy, and if he had been successful, "we wouldn't have had all these problems over the years." In the resulting furor, Lott was criticized by senators from both parties, and then-President George W. Bush declined to throw him a lifeline.

Ensign publicly supported Lott for the two weeks the Mississippi senator was under fire. But after Lott relinquished the leadership job, Ensign said he had privately urged Lott to quit.

Review-Journal writer Benjamin Spillman and Stephens Washington Bureau Chief Steve Tedesco contributed to this report. Contact Laura Myers at lmyers@reviewjournal.com or 702-387-2919.

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THE 15 MOST CORRUPT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

POLITICAL NOTEBOOK: Probe into Ensign scandal stays cloudy

by Benjamin Spillman, Las Vegas Review-Journal

December 7, 2009

The official silence from the Senate Ethics Committee and U.S. Department of Justice makes watching the investigation into alleged corruption by Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., a little like watching interpretive dance: lots of stuff is happening but it is tough to say what it means.

Ensign is accused of using his status as a senator in a failed attempt to cover the tracks of an extramarital affair with former political employee Cindy Hampton.

Hampton's husband, Doug Hampton, a former employee in Ensign's Senate office, says the senator lined up lobbying contacts and work to get the betrayed husband out of his hair.

Hampton also says Ensign's family paid his family \$96,000 in severance pay for leaving. Ensign says it was a gift. If it was the former, Ensign could have violated financial reporting requirements.

But just how far the Senate Ethics Committee and the Justice Department will go in investigating the details and what that will mean for Ensign is less clear.

Most recently, sources have confirmed the Ethics Committee has issued subpoenas to a former Ensign consultant, a Nevada company Hampton says he helped to lobby Ensign and others. Some say the subpoenas show the Ethics Committee is advancing the investigation and that the Justice Department could take action next.

"All these entities going slowly and it is not surprising it has taken this amount of time," said one Washington, D.C., source who is following the investigation closely and has worked on similar cases.

The source says if the Ethics Committee, whose focus is Senate-related issues, digs up anything suggesting laws were broken, the Justice Department could step in. That would up the ante for Ensign. He could face serious legal consequences.

"They're not up against any window here. It is not like his term is ready to come to an end," the source said.

Melanie Sloan, however, sees the Senate ethics probe as a sign the Justice Department may take a pass and let Ensign off the hook, legally speaking. Sloan is the executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington and a critic of politicians alleged to be corrupt.

Typically, the Justice Department wouldn't conduct a simultaneous investigation, said Sloan, a former assistant U.S. attorney. "That is not 100 percent. But that is traditionally how it is handled. I find that very disappointing."

Sloan says the Justice Department's botched handling of an investigation into corruption allegations against former Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, has made department officials tentative.

"The department has egg on its face after the Ted Stevens debacle and I don't think they are in a rush to prosecute any senator," she said.

HECK CRITICIZED OVER PLEDGES

Critics from both ends of the political spectrum are going after former Republican state Sen. Joe Heck for his stance on taxes and tax pledges.

The pledges by the group Americans for Tax Reform are documents for candidates to sign to declare they will oppose tax increases if elected.

In March, when Heck was an early-stage candidate for governor, he said he wouldn't sign such a pledge because "voters elect politicians to make the right decision based on the circumstances."

However, as a candidate for the congressional seat held by Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., Heck has signed a pledge.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has called Heck a "campaign flip-flopper."

Rob Lauer, another Republican seeking the Thus seat, has said Heck "is pretending to be a fiscal conservative." Heck campaign manager Grant Hewitt says neither assertion is true.

He says Heck hasn't changed his philosophical stripes; he just realized folks wanted more than a promise when it comes to fighting taxes.

Hewitt said that after traveling the state campaigning, Heck decided signing the document was a good way to elevate his stance from words to action.

"His word was his bond, he was going on that. As we traveled around the state we heard over and over again people's word wasn't good enough," Hewitt said. "We needed to put our word to paper and Dr. Joe Heck did that."

ANGLE GAINING MOMENTUM

Although Danny Tarkanian and Sue Lowden are the favorites in the Republican primary to challenge Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., there's another candidate quietly gaining ground.

Student conservative Shaaron Angle, a former assemblywoman, was the choice of 13 percent of Republicans responding to a recent Mason-Dixon Polling & Research survey. Lowden and Tarkanian were at 25 and 24 percent, respectively.

"I don't count Angle out," said Brad Coker, managing partner of Mason-Dixon. "The conservative wing of the Republican Party is very strong in primary elections."

Of the remaining candidates, Coker said: "I think the rest of them are single-digit also-rans at this point."

Contact reporter Benjamin Spillman at bspillman@reviewjournal.com or 702-363-0267.

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- Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA)
- Rep. Don Young (R-AK)

Ensign speaks of affair with ex-staffer

By Benjamin Spillman, Las Vegas Review-Journal

December 1, 2009

Sen. John Ensign on Monday denied breaking the law to cover up an extramarital affair with a former employee and said he's "very fortunate to have a forgiving wife."

Ensign, R-Nev., made the comments during an hour-long appearance on "Morning Source with Host Alan Stock," a conservative talk show on Newsradio 940, KQST.

It was Ensign's first media appearance in Las Vegas in which he addressed the affair and subsequent allegations of an illegal cover-up since the scandal broke in June. In addition to repeating that he didn't break any laws, Ensign said he plans to serve out his term, which ends in 2012.

Ensign and Stock spent just a fraction of the time discussing the scandal, and callers wanting to dive into the details weren't put through to the studio. Most of the conversation was about other issues ranging from health care to immigration to Iran policy.

"If they had a personal question, a question about his personal life, we were not going to put them on," Stock said. "I wouldn't bring the senator on to blindside him, which is why he came on my show."

Still, Stock did ask Ensign about allegations the senator broke so-called "revolving door" laws that restrict lobbying by former Senate employees when he helped Doug Hampton, another former employee and husband to Ensign's former mistress Cindy Hampton, find work at Nevada companies in their dealings with government.

In statements to "Nightline" and The New York Times, Doug Hampton alleged Ensign lined up lobbying contacts for him despite laws and Senate rules against such activity. Hampton attorney Daniel Abregos had no comment on the Stock interview.

Ensign told Stock any assistance he gave Hampton was comparable to employer recommendations he has made on behalf of other former employees.

"It is a very common practice. It is perfectly legal," Ensign said. "I complied with Senate ethics rules."

Melanie Sloan, one of Ensign's most persistent critics, said the explanation doesn't hold water.

"He didn't just introduce him (Hampton) to other people, he helped him set up a lobbying practice," said Sloan, a former assistant United States attorney and currently executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. "There are very specific rules about lobbying that don't apply to other jobs."

In addition to asserting he didn't break the law by helping Hampton, Ensign said he will serve out the remainder of his term despite calls to resign by Stock and other conservatives.

"I was elected to a six-year term by the people of Nevada, and I fully intend on serving that out," Ensign said.

He added that his resignation could undermine efforts by Republicans to oust Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., in 2010.

A second Senate seat to scrap over would open another front on the state's political battlefield and shake Republican forces, he said.

Ensign, who has a political nonprogression pact with Reid, highlighted his own efforts to oppose Reid's political agenda.

"I fight against issues Harry Reid believes in every day," Ensign said. "I don't back down at all in the fight against Harry Reid on issues."

Reid spokesman Jon Summers responded.

"Senator Reid and Senator Ensign have a good relationship and a long history of working together on important Nevada issues. That won't change," Summers said. "When it comes to deciding whether to resign, the needs of Nevadans, not politics, should be the top priority."

Stock also asked for a response to criticism that by having an affair, Ensign ran afoul of conservative Christian principles that had been part of his political rhetoric.

"I had standards, have standards," Ensign said. "I didn't meet those standards. That doesn't mean the standards are wrong."

Ensign went on to say his marriage to wife Darlene is better than ever.

"We're actually doing better than we have ever done before," Ensign said. "I happen to be very fortunate to have a forgiving wife."

Contact reporter Benjamin Spillman at bspillman@reviewjournal.com or 702-477-3861.

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WHAT'S FOR SUPPER?: These Las Vegas personalities deserve 'turkey' status

By David and Bonnie Ashley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

November 23, 2009

David Ashley is former president of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and the fact that he's the "former" president seems due, at least in part, to his wife, Bonnie.

On the advice of their lawyers, the Board of Regents was cautious about discussing her during the July meeting in which David Ashley was demoted. Former Chancellor Jim Rogers had no such qualms in a June memo to the board, saying Bonnie Ashley had treated UNLV employees harshly.

If her critics are to be believed, Bonnie ran around UNLV as if she were a bargain basement Marie Antoinette. According to those critics, Bonnie -- who was known to refer to herself as UNLV's first lady -- had berated and threatened UNLV staffers, creating an environment in which paranoia ruled.

Granted, it seemed that David Ashley's demotion had something to do with his lack of communication skills. Still, it's probably safe to assume that Ashley's at-best cluelessness or at-worst unwillingness to deal with his unpopular wife hurt him. And, at the very least, it didn't track well when Bonnie's explanatory e-mail to the regents and Rogers stressed that she didn't want the missive to be "misconstrued as an apology for being a strong-minded woman."

So, to Bonnie Ashley we offer a dinner featuring the bossiest hen in the barnyard and, to David Ashley, a feast featuring capon.

AUCIA JACOBS

Alicia Jacobs, KVBC-TV, Channel 3's entertainment reporter, has shown an almost preternatural ability during the past year for inserting herself smack into the middle of stories she covers.

A silly public feud with "Peepshow" star Holly Madison.

A stint as a Miss USA pageant judge that devolved into a post-pageant crusade against former Miss California USA Carrie Prejean. (Actual April 7 tweet: "yikes! just did an interview with THE TODAY SHOW ... it will air this morning. (Tues) Guess who has naked pics about 2 b released?")

Another public flap, this time with talk show host Bonnie Hunt, when Jacobs took her puppy to Danny Gans' Encore opening.

And, worst of all, Gans' death, which somehow seemed to become more about Jacobs than Gans, complete with Jacobs' on-air tears and updates about how she was holding up under the strain. (Actual May 3 tweet: "Wish I could say I was feeling better about things today, but I'm not. I am so sad. Why did we have 2 lose Danny?")

Maybe it's journalism, maybe it just looks like whatever journalism is turning into. Either way, to Jacobs, we offer a magnificent soy turkey: it looks like turkey but, underneath, is nothing at all like it.

MIKE SANFORD

We hate to sound like we're piling on, but college football is a numbers game. And, once the numbers were crunched, Mike Sanford found himself without a job.

On Nov. 15, Sanford was sacked as head coach of the UNLV Rebels after five losing seasons.

But even those who have supported Sanford may have felt blindsided earlier this week, when, during a news conference, he placed the blame for the Rebels' chronically anemic performance at the feet of the community, the university, and even, it seemed, the Rebels locker room.

At, in fact, everybody but himself.

We'll simply offer Sanford a turkey bone, one of many he apparently has to pick with UNLV and the community.

JOHN ENSIGN

So, Nevada Sen. John Ensign allegedly has an affair with an employee, allegedly lines up lobbying contacts for the woman's husband to make up for it, and now finds himself dropping in the polls and under investigation for ethics violations.

Tacky, sure, but let's ladle onto this not atypical -- by political standards, anyway -- entree a heaping helping of hypocrisy: Ensign, a renowned family values guy, was one of the loudest advocates on Capitol Hill for impeaching President Bill Clinton for his sexual relationship with an intern.

To Ensign, we offer a Thanksgiving Day dinner at the nearest diner, alone, so that he can ruminate about -- to use a phrase Ensign himself has used in different circumstances -- the sanctity of marriage.

AUBREY O'DAY

You're a performer whose success depends in large part on your pulchritude. You've performed in a reality show that required you to wear scanty clothing, you've performed in a girl group wearing scanty clothing, you've posed for Playboy and, then, you take a job at a show called "Peepshow" that requires you to be, yes, topless.

Then suppose somebody took a photo of you during that show, annotated it with a snarky remark, and posted it online. It would be rude and sophomoric, and, in such a position, you'd probably curse, cry and then get on with your life.

But would you not show up to work the next day and then post a YouTube rebuttal in which you flaunt your body, apparently to show the world that it's a more fit body than it appeared to be in the boobey photo?

Didn't think so. And while we're all in favor of spirited debate, we do feel compelled to offer her a fine Thanksgiving turkey ... fully dressed, of course.

NINA RADETICH

We know how tricky daily journalism can be and how difficult it can be to parse the ethical situations that arise.

But here's one ethical situation that doesn't require a consult with Solomon: You don't refer the subject of your news outlet's investigative report to your boyfriend for PR rehab.

Yes, that's allegedly what Radetich, KTNV-TV, Channel 3's anchor, did. And, whether it was out of a moment of weakness, a fumbled effort at empathy or deliberate misbehavior, it's wrong.

Journalists, both broadcast and print, around town have been disciplined for lesser offenses. Radetich, however, protected by KTNV general manager Jim Prather, has escaped with nothing more than public disdain (which, it should be noted, has been ruthless).

So, for Radetich and her boss, we offer a Thanksgiving dinner for two of crow, an entree they'll apparently never be forced to eat otherwise.

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EDITORIAL: A changing of the guard?

By Editorial Board, Las Vegas Review-Journal

October 17, 2009

These are interesting times for Nevada's congressional delegation. So interesting that it may include a number of new faces within the next three years.

For Rep. Dean Heller, the Republican who represents the entire state outside Clark County, and Rep. Shelley Berkley, the Democrat whose district covers most of urban Las Vegas, it appears to be smooth sailing.

But the state's third House member, Rep. Dina Titus, doesn't have it so good. Congressional Quarterly has put the freshman Democrat in the "vulnerable" category for next year's elections. Rep. Titus, though, has raised \$761,823 so far to go along with \$571,668 she had in the bank.

"Money is a powerful check against an anti-Democratic wave or any problems that emerge with President Obama's popularity," Julian Zelizer, a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University, told Bloomberg News.

Indeed, we'll see how well it inoculates Rep. Titus next November.

Meanwhile, Nevada's two senators face a host of difficulties.

Republican John Ensign continues to bleed from the wounds suffered when he announced he had an affair with a campaign staffer -- and tried to keep it quiet with what amounted to hush money. He isn't up for re-election until 2012, though many observers have already pronounced him DOA. But three years is an eternity in politics, so don't shovel dirt on him yet. Suffice it to say, though, that a safe seat will now be in play come 2012 -- even if Sen. Ensign decides to seek re-election.

Finally, Sen. Harry Reid has seen his Nevada poll numbers crumble as he pushes the liberal agenda of Senate Democrats. The comparisons to Tom Daschle are obvious and appropriate. Nevada was in the national spotlight during the early Democratic caucuses last year. Look for the attention to be even more intense next year as the top Democrat in the Senate tries to work himself out of trouble.

Couple all this with the fact that Gov. Jim Gibbons is a long shot for re-election -- there's speculation he may not even run -- and Nevada may be on the verge of a political changing of the guard not seen in many decades.

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THE 15 MOST CORRUPT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Extramarital affair, illegal lobbying allegations hurting Ensign

By Benjamin Spillman, Las Vegas Review-Journal

October 14, 2009

So much for the adage there's no such thing as bad publicity.

Fallout from an extramarital affair scandal and allegations of an illegal lobbying conspiracy are dragging down former political high roller Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev.

The percentage of likely voters who would re-elect Ensign in 2012 sunk to 22 percent last week, an eight-point dip from August.

And among his core constituents, the decline is even more pronounced. Among Republicans, there was a 19 point decline from August with just 38 percent now stating they would vote to re-elect the junior senator.

The numbers are results from a poll of 500 registered Nevada voters surveyed by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research Inc. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

The results suggest Ensign has not been able to get voters to look beyond revelations of an affair with then-employee Cindy Hampton and allegations he lined up lobbying contacts for Doug Hampton, another former employee and Cindy Hampton's husband, to compensate for the infidelity.

News of the scandal broke in June but got a boost Oct. 2 with an article on the front page of The New York Times that detailed the lobbying allegations, using documents Doug Hampton provided to bolster his case.

"His numbers are still going down," said Mason-Dixon managing partner Brad Coker. "They are worse now than they have ever been. I guess this drip, drip, drip is taking its toll."

According to the poll, 23 percent of respondents view Ensign favorably, 43 percent unfavorably, 32 percent were neutral and 2 percent didn't recognize him.

In August, 30 percent held a favorable view of Ensign, 37 percent unfavorable and 31 percent were neutral.

In May, before the affair became public, 53 percent viewed Ensign favorably, 18 percent unfavorably and 23 percent were neutral.

"It is clear he has taken a hit on it. The consistent barrage of negative news is bound to make an electoral difference," said Republican consultant Ryan Erwin. "It has all been negative news, and it certainly smells bad."

Since Ensign acknowledged the affair in June, he sought to move past it by asserting himself in the debate over health insurance reform.

This approach appeared to be working, as recent news coverage focused on amendments Ensign proposed for insurance reform bills but didn't note the scandal.

That changed with The New York Times item.

"Obviously this is a huge distraction," Erwin said, noting the lobbying violation allegations are unproven.

"Instead of being innocent until proven guilty, politicians as a whole are guilty until proven innocent."

Jennifer Duffy of the Cook Political Report says eroding support among Republicans is the clearest sign Ensign's career hangs in the balance.

"That's not good. He has lost support within the family, as they say," Duffy said.

If the election were held today, 25 percent of Republicans said they would consider a candidate other than Ensign and 23 percent said they would vote to replace him. Both numbers are up from the August poll.

"You know he is going to get a primary challenge now," said David Damore, a political science professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. "Even Nevada has its limits."

Contact reporter Benjamin Spillman at bspillman@reviewjournal.com or 702-477-3861.

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Group: Ensign's actions illegal

By Benjamin Spliman, Las Vegas Review-Journal

October 7, 2009

A Washington, D.C., ethics watchdog group turned up the heat on Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., on Tuesday and said Ensign's efforts to cover up an extramarital affair were comparable to actions that in 2006 landed former Rep. Bob Ney, R-Ohio, behind bars.

In a letter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Melanie Sloan of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington detailed laws she thinks Ensign broke as he sought to manage the fallout from an affair with then-employee Andy Hampton, wife to then-aide Doug Hampton.

Sloan says Ensign conspired to evade lobbying restrictions that prohibit former congressional workers from influencing their former colleagues for a year after leaving the government.

A willful violation of this ban is a felony, Sloan wrote in a four-page letter with 15 pages of supporting documentation.

In an interview Sloan said conspiring to evade the lobbying ban is one of the charges that stuck to Ney, who was sentenced to 30 months in prison as part of the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal.

"I think John Ensign is in a lot of trouble here," Sloan said. "It is nearly identical behavior."

Ensign is accused of helping to line up lobbying jobs and clients for Doug Hampton in an effort to get him out of Ensign's Senate office after the affair came to light among the group's social circle but before it was known to the public.

A New York Times article last week documented evidence that Doug Hampton said showed how Ensign supported efforts to line up lobbying jobs with Nevada companies seeking access to government officials.

The Senate Select Committee on Ethics is looking into the matter, based on an earlier complaint from Sloan's group, and experts on public corruption cases say it is likely federal law enforcement officials will scrutinize the allegations.

"There is certainly a reasonable likelihood that criminal authorities will look at the conduct," said Kenneth Gross, an attorney who heads Skadden's Political Law practice in Washington, D.C., and has expertise in regulation of political activity.

Gross said the comparison of Ensign to Ney is apt, but with limitations.

"I think mentioning the fact another congressman was charged with that same violation is relevant to considering the exposure of Senator Ensign," Gross said. "However, it is not determinative of anything."

The case against Ney included allegations that Ney received hundreds of thousands of dollars in gifts such as meals in fancy restaurants, luxury golf outings and tickets to high-profile sporting events. Conspiring with his former chief-of-staff to violate the lobbying ban was among the wrongdoings to which Ney admitted.

"One factor that distinguishes it is that Bob Ney was being accused of a whole host of matters involving a broad scandal that touched many players," Gross said. "It was an added charge to several others that resulted in a lengthy prison sentence."

Ensign asserts he broke no laws and committed no Senate ethical violations.

In a statement responding to the latest CREW complaint and to a subsequent interview by a news team from CNN that pursued Ensign outside his office and onto the street in Washington, D.C., Ensign's spokeswoman Rebecca Fisher maintained his innocence.

"Sen. Ensign is confident he complied with all laws and ethics rules and plans to cooperate with any inquiry," the statement said.

Sloan, a former assistant U.S. attorney, said it probably will be months before there is a resolution to the allegations against Ensign.

She said CREW raised concerns about Ney as early as 2004, but his legal fate wasn't decided until 2006.

"These things don't go quickly. It is not like you should expect to see Ensign indicted this year," she said.

Contact reporter Benjamin Spillman at bspillman@reviewjournal.com or 702-477-3861.

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Ensign facing more pressure from ethics group over affair

By Benjamin Spillman, Las Vegas Review-Journal

October 6, 2009

There's more pressure on Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., to answer allegations he orchestrated an illegal lobbying scheme in an effort to cover up an extramarital affair with a former employee.

On Tuesday Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington updated their complaints against Ensign with both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Senate Select Committee on Ethics.

The updates follow an extensive article last week in the New York Times that detailed allegations by former aide Doug Hampton.

Hampton is the husband of Cindy Hampton, the former Ensign employee with whom the Senator acknowledged the affair.

Doug Hampton says after the affair came to light in the couples' social circle, Ensign helped arrange lobbying contacts so Doug Hampton would have gainful employment following his departure from the senator's staff.

CREW's letters detail the allegations with the goal of assisting with any potential investigations.

Also on Tuesday, a CNN news team sought unsuccessfully to get Ensign to comment in detail on the allegations. Ensign insisted he didn't break any laws or violate ethics rules.

"All of these things will, you know, come out," Ensign told CNN. "All of these things will come out at their due time. But there's no question, we complied with all of the ethics."

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JOHN L. SMITH: Ensign's troubles grow while Nevada Republicans stay quiet

That sound you hear is the hole getting deeper for Sen. John Ensign in the Doug Hampton job search investigation.

The New York Times on Thursday reported e-mail messages have been turned over to the FBI and Senate ethics investigators that show Ensign "steering lobbying work to the embittered husband (Hampton) of his former mistress and could deepen his legal and political troubles."

That's what's known as understatement. The e-mails appear to illustrate Ensign being disingenuous when he stated he didn't know the work he was helping Hampton find would involve congressional lobbying.

It was previously known Ensign tried to get consulting work for Hampton with NV Energy and Allegiant Air. On Thursday, P2SA Equity of Las Vegas was spotlighted.

Ensign spokeswoman Rebecca Fisher reiterated previous statements that Ensign acted in accordance with ethics rules and violated no law.

According to e-mails now in the hands of FBI agents, P2SA co-owner and Ensign donor Greg Paulk and company Executive Vice President Bob Andrews were contacted about hiring Hampton.

"I took this as a helpful hint," Andrews told Times reporters.

The Times story brings into further focus the role played by Ensign political adviser Mike Slanker.

In an e-mail to Hampton, Slanker wrote: "Spoke with JE about the Paulks. They are looking into energy stuff in rural NV possibly and might need BLM help."

With Ensign's political career enduring a slow, steady burn, you might think U.S. Senate hopefuls and other senior members of Nevada's Republican Party would have something to say about their fallen, fair-haired boy. The stench from the Ensign investigation is obviously hurting the party's chances to return to power in Nevada.

But that's the other sound you hear: silence.

GOOD WILL HURTING? Metro police and local firefighters have perennially been popular with most citizens, but I'm wondering whether their labor representatives fully appreciate the precarious position they're in as the local economy continues to tumble.

Balking at trimming their extremely generous pay and benefit packages at a time their fellow citizens are hurting is a good way to lose their biggest ally -- the public.

REED WHIPPLE: At least for the next year, it appears the Rainbow Youth Theater Company and Las Vegas Youth Orchestra will stay at downtown's Reed Whipple Cultural Center despite plans to slash its budget, City Manager Betsy Fretwell says.

Concerned parents with children in the theater group and orchestra have relied on the half-century-old Reed Whipple center for rehearsals for years. There have been rumors the center would be closed, perhaps to make way for a redevelopment project. Fretwell says there are no immediate plans to raze the center. She did indicate it might be available for a public-private partnership.

ON THE BOULEVARD: Businessman Bobby Ellis and the employees of Dynalectric really came through for

Saturday's St. Baldrick's fundraiser for childhood cancer research... Speaking of shaving for a good cause, don't forget Saturday's second annual Klip it for Kidz fundraiser at 10 a.m. at Town Square. Mayor Oscar Goodman will play barber, and Metro officers and Clark County firefighters will participate. Goodman is already playing barber with city employees. ... If you want to exercise for a good cause, the Nevada Child Seekers' 16th annual Dash & Stroll is set for Saturday morning at The District at Green Valley Ranch.

BOULEVARD II: I've heard of quickie books, but Chris Dortch's "Blue Ribbon NCAA Basketball Tournament Guide" might be the fastest: The tournament selection is Sunday, the 140-page guide for basketball betting fanatics goes to press that night and ships Monday for arrival Tuesday at Gambler's Book Club at 1550 E. Tropicana Ave. "It's like ice cream," GBC boss Howard Schwartz says. "It starts melting right away." Come to think of it, so do most of my picks.

Have an item for the Bard of the Boulevard? E-mail comments and contributions to Smith@reviewjournal.com or call (702) 383-0295. He also blogs at vtj.com/blogs/smith.

Find this article at:

http://www.lvj.com/news/ensign_s-troubles-grow-while-nevada-republicans-stay-quiet-87444832.html



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Ensign's troubles grow while Nevada Republicans stay quiet

By John L. Smith, Las Vegas Review-Journal

March 12, 2010

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The Times story brings into further focus the role played by Ensign political adviser Mike Slanker.

In an e-mail to Hampton, Slanker wrote: "Spoke with JE about the Paulks. They are looking into energy stuff in rural NV possibly and might need BUM help."

With Ensign's political career enduring a slow, steady burn, you might think U.S. Senate hopefuls and other senior members of Nevada's Republican Party would have something to say about their fallen, fair-haired boy. The stench from the Ensign investigation is obviously hurting the party's chances to return to power in Nevada.

But that's the other sound you hear: silence.

GOOD WILL HURTING? Metro police and local firefighters have perennially been popular with most citizens, but I'm wondering whether their labor representatives fully appreciate the precarious position they're in as the local economy continues to tumble.

Balking at trimming their extremely generous pay and benefit packages at a time their fellow citizens are hurting is a good way to lose their biggest ally -- the public.

REED WHIPPLE: At least for the next year, it appears the Rainbow Youth Theater Company and Las Vegas Youth Orchestra will stay at downtown's Reed Whipple Cultural Center despite plans to slash its budget. City Manager Betty Fretwell says.

Concerned parents with children in the theater group and orchestra have relied on the half-century-old Reed Whipple center for rehearsals for years. There have been rumors the center would be closed, perhaps to make way for a redevelopment project. Fretwell says there are no immediate plans to raze the center. She did indicate it might be available for a public-private partnership.

ON THE BOULEVARD: Businessman Bobby Ellis and the employees of Dynaleptic really came through for Saturday's St. Baldrick's fundraiser for childhood cancer research. Speaking of shaving for a good cause, don't forget Saturday's second annual Mip It for Kids fundraiser at 10 a.m. at Town Square. Mayor Oscar Goodman will play barber, and Metro officers and Clark County firefighters will participate. Goodman is already playing barber with dry employees. If you want to exercise for a good cause, the Nevada Child Seekers' 16th annual Dash & Stroll is set for Saturday morning at The District at Green Valley Ranch.

BOULEVARD II: I've heard of guide books, but Chris Dorch's "Blue Ribbon NCAA Basketball Tournament Guide" might be the fastest: The tournament selection is Sunday, the 140-page guide for basketball betting fanatics goes to press that night and ships Monday for arrival Tuesday at Gambler's Book Club at 1550 E. Tropicana Ave. "It's like ice cream." GBC boss Howard Schwartz says. "It starts melting right away." Come to think of it, so do most of my picks.

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